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THE

CLAIMS OF GREEK

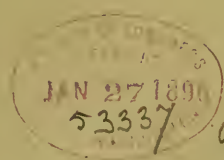
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THE CLAIMS OF GREEK

This is no new question that is brought before us for discussion. The friends of the humanities have waged many a battle against this foe, for he is no warrior of tender years. Among the Greeks of old we find the rivalry between music and gymnastics, between the culture gained under the superintendence of the Muses and the physical training of the body exclusively. One side was in favor of producing Spartans—fighters ; the other side, Athenians—thinkers. At Rome we find Cicero raising his voice—and he could raise it—against the enemies of philosophy and letters. To-day the same question has been raised, the same contest renewed, under somewhat different circumstances. It is no longer gymnastics versus the cultivation of the Muses, as in Greece ; nor physical prowess opposed to philosophy and letters, as at Rome ; but now it is applied science and technical training versus liberal culture and sound education. If we examine the question carefully we shall find that it is a struggle between the champions of mind and those of matter ; between the study of soul and that of soil. How often, to the shame of both contestants, has the struggle become positively degrading ! And what has been going on during this contest ? That delicate thing—that marvellous thing—the young human mind, has been dragged here, pulled there, by these contestants who call themselves educators, as if they were so many starving dogs and this human mind a bone. It is to our kind old teacher that we turn again, as we must so often do, to settle for us this worse than school-boy quarrel. It is to Athens, “ the source of art and cultured thought,” the teacher of her myriad youths to-day in every clime, that we appeal in our dispute. Athens in her golden days trained her native youths, as few since then have been trained, by judiciously combining the studies of the Muses—the culture of the mind—with the health-giving and vigor-renewing gymnastics—the training of the body. Let us then take home to our hearts this lesson of our teacher. Let us not hereafter, each from his own separate booth, be crying out our wares, to the distraction

of every innocent youth who may approach ; but let us join in erecting a new temple of learning where the young votary may enter, worship, and pass forth an educated man. It was the apostate emperor Julian who excluded the classic writers from the christian schools that he might exclude higher learning and influence from their midst. We must not imitate him ; for, if we do, we may be compelled to cry out at last, as he did : “Thou hast destroyed me, O Mithras !” Let us come to that mutual understanding which the eminent scientist Tyndall longed for when he said : “Is there no mind in England large enough to see the value of both classics and science and to secure for each fair play ? Let us unsphere the spirit of Plato, listen to the noble music of the past, and still honor the genius of our own time.” Surely the mind that would say him nay is narrow and blighted, and not one that is “full-orbed ” by the study of the classics and rounded off by what our German brethren call the “science of antiquity”. It has not drunk from that living spring which pre-eminently is called liberal education.

What is meant by education ? Unfortunately the Pythian oracle has not yet given us an answer with which every one is satisfied. To this riddle no profound Oedipus has ventured an answer to which all agree. Why is this ? It is because we do not distinguish sharply between education and instruction. Education is the natural and healthy development of man’s God-given powers, but instruction furnishes only the means and mechanical appliances. The instructed man must not be confounded with the educated man, as is so often done at the present time. The champions of short-cuts, modern subjects wholly, narrow specialization, lightning express courses, confuse the instructed man with the educated man. The mere acquisition of facts is confounded by them with the “plastic process of assimilation” of facts, which alone is true education. Dr. Bernard once said : “The object of education is to *form* and not to *inform* the mind.” In such a great work as this, time is an essential element and “short cuts” are impossible. A college education—and this should mean a liberal education—should awaken, arouse, exercise, develop all the intellectual faculties of the student. It should make the student think and lead him to aspire. The Spartans frowned on all exercises that did not point directly to efficiency in battle. Contrast their course of instruction with that of the Athenians and behold the results as marked by the number of milestones passed by each of the two cities in the world’s march of progress. The Spartans

were "instructed" in the "practical" school; the Athenians were "educated" in the school of liberal culture. In the clear light of history we cannot hesitate for a moment in our choice of the two nations and their methods; yet in weakness of judgment and short-sighted vision so many of to-day follow the example of the Spartans and frown on all studies that do not prepare directly for the so-called "work of life". But what, may we ask, is the "work of life"? This is the great question. Did the Spartans know what is the "work of life"? If they did then man is but a machine—be that a Gatling gun or a minute. The weakness of the Spartans is the weakness of many modern men and institutions. There is too intense a desire for material well-being and self-advancement, cost what it may to others, which is dwarfing and narrowing the minds of many. No subject is worthy of study, in their opinion, if they cannot read the sordid dollar sign between the lines. The goddess of liberty is their ideal, but she must be stamped upon the precious metal. It is manifestly our duty to counteract such tendencies, and to prove to those who come to our halls of learning that there is a "work of life" far higher and nobler than merely making ourselves comfortable and raising ourselves a notch or two in the social scale. We must present to them the high ideal of the Greek writer who says "The best fruit of life is an honest heart and labor for the good of fellow-man." When we choose studies which we think will prepare us for the "work of life" let us first be sure that we have the right idea of our "work of life".

We have heard so much about letting the classics go. But that is not the question. We ought rather to ask, Will they let us go? We cannot tear ourselves from Greece and Rome if we wish. The present strikes its roots deep into the soil of the past and draws its nourishment therefrom. We could not have a family quarrel and separate from our "loftier brothers of antiquity" if we would. The best minds of to-day, they who are really competent to judge of the question, are becoming more and more united in saying, "We would not if we could." The teachers in the schools of the east tell us that statistics prove the study of Greek is on the increase; that a greater number take it every year. There they are recognizing as never before the paramount importance of classics as the foundation for any line of intellectual activity. The classic languages, literatures, histories, are the life of our life; the very blood of our blood. Athens is far more to us than Theseus ever was to her. Rome means far more to us than Romulus did to the

once proud mistress of the world. And yet they would not give up their Theseus or their Romulus, because that would destroy the unity of their national life. Shall we ruthlessly endeavor to spoil the unity of our intellectual life by saying "we will discard the classics"? Not until we can forcibly separate the present for the past is it possible to draw out of our intellectual life the fibres woven into it by the "loom of time". This it is that makes the classics an indispensable necessity in all of our higher education. We read in the *Märchen* of Goethe how the will-o'-the-wisps "with their pointed tongues licked the gold veins out of the giant figure, and at last, when the smallest filaments were eaten out, the image fell." It requires no great effort to see that a similar fate would soon overtake our higher education if the golden threads of the classics were severed. Mr. John Kennedy, superintendent of schools of Batavia, N. Y., is no idle dreamer or visionary when he says "If Greek goes the college goes." The Greeks have not only pointed out the course for us but they have dug the channels of our thought and intellectual activity. We follow Greek lines in all of our literature. Our architecture is based on Greek models. We attempt to get as near to Greece as we can. Why was the "White City" such a splendid success last year? Because Phidias and Praxiteles were the real architects who directed the work and imparted some of their genius to our modern men. Our political life takes us back at every turn to Greece. Our very language is becoming more and more Greek every day and it will continue to do so. They whose vision is so narrow, whose education is so stunted, that they have no adequate appreciation of the importance of these facts to the true student, have no right to speak of the inutility of Greek or of dropping Greek from the curriculum. Europe did stop the study of Greek once and what was the result? The dark ages came, when the barbarian groped in his hovel built on the mosaics and between the columns of a great and past civilization. But when the Greeks were driven out of Constantinople they went west and taught the language of their books. This was the lamp of Aladdin that dispelled the intellectual darkness and gloom of centuries. These poor earthworms, these clods, these western Goths, drank of the nectar from the Pierian spring and lo! they became gods—intellectual gods. They claimed their birthright as "heirs of all the ages" and came into possession of their inheritance. The world has learned too well its bitter lesson to deliberately knock out the very keystone from the arch that spans its portal of learning.

We have heard a great deal of the past, not so much now as

formerly, about the so-called "dead" languages. They who used that term are careful not to modify it as it should be. They are "dead" to those who cannot or will not read them, but not dead to those who have entered into the spirit of classical masterpieces. If you call them "dead" then you must call Chaucer dead, Milton dead, Browning dead, for you have to read their writings now to know the poet's soul. Dr. W. T. Harris, United States Commissioner of Education, whose authority as a leader in education cannot be questioned, says: "In the light of the doctrine of evolution which is beginning to prevail in natural science, and will soon prevail in all education, Greek and Latin are not dead languages." No language is dead that conveys to us thoughts that are held as a noble heritage of the past which men will not suffer to be lost. Such a language is crystallized into a life that is incapable of death. It is impossible to apply the term "dead" to Greek, for that has been a living spoken language, with an unbroken continuity, for over three thousand years. There is no greater change in the Greek language of Demosthenes and Plato compared with that of to-day than there is in the language of Chaucer compared with that of our own time. "Dead" is nothing but a catchword.

Another catchword that has done much mischief is the term "compulsory". They who say "Away with compulsory Greek" are very careful not to finish their sentence for that would destroy the force of their favorite term. "Compulsory" attached to a thing gives it a hateful look. But if the writer is not mistaken, even our ABC's were learned by very many of us under some compulsion. The fear of the birch has induced many a lad to learn a lesson. Should the lesson therefore not have been given by the teacher nor learned by the pupil? In fact the most of human actions are to a great extent compulsory in one form or another. If we should do nothing that is in the least degree compulsory we should soon be in a far worse condition than the companions of Odysseus after they had eaten of the lotus. But suppose we could do away with "compulsory" Greek. What follows? We must substitute compulsory something else,—either compulsory German, or compulsory French, or compulsory science, and hence the term means nothing.

Over the entrance of the temple of Apollo at Delphi were inscribed the words *Γινώθι σεαυτόν* (know thyself). This was the mainspring of Greek ethical teaching. This is the true end of all liberal education in the highest sense of the term. Liberal education however must be sharply distinguished from technical educa-

tion. The former broadens the man and puts him in sympathetic touch with his fellow men wherever they may be or whenever they may have been. As its name implies it make a *free* man of him. The latter narrows him down to some special calling. It teaches him a trade. It makes him a machine whose wheels will turn if you drop the right piece of money in the slot. But it is *not* a college education. Both are useful—both are necessary—but they must not be confounded as they so often are by nearsighted persons. The liberal education—the college education—must precede the technical, else you will find the machine getting the better of the man. You must broaden his vision and let him view the world's landscape before he concentrates his fixed gaze upon some definite point. I have known students who thought the sum total of all excellencies was bounded on the north by South Dakota, on the east by Iowa, on the south by Kansas, and on the west by Colorado. I have watched with great interest the same students as their eyes were opened, their sympathies enlarged, their judgment broadened, and that too during a three months trip to Europe. It is a similar influence which the study of the classics exerts upon the intellectual life of the student. The classics take the student on a trip abroad ; they lay his foundation on a broad and firm basis, before he begins to build his superstructure. That course of study which will best enable a man to know himself and his environment is undoubtedly *the* course above all others which constitutes a liberal education. The broader and more extended a man's knowledge of the past, of the thoughts and feelings and purposes of the best of mankind, the better will he know his environment and his relations to his fellow man, and he will have a more perfect knowledge of himself. We have all of us heard of the individual who was found in front of a fence trying to lift himself over by pulling at his boot-straps. Something like this occurs when a young man tries to become broadly and liberally educated by pursuing the study of nothing but "moderns". He goes round and round in a narrow circle and wonders why his vision is so narrow, why the landscape has so often the same appearance, why he never seems to approach nearer his ideal of a really educated man. In all higher education we stand—we must stand—upon the shoulders of the ancients. The firmer and more erect we take that stand the wider and more comprehensive will be our view of life and of the work of life.

It has never been questioned by those who are competent to judge that Greek as an instrument of intellectual and linguistic training stands unequalled among our cognate languages. Lin-

guistic training is justly considered a prime requisite of sound education. The study of the Greek language, because it is universally acknowledged to be the most perfect language that we have, is well fitted to occupy a crowning position in an education that has for its aim the attainment of liberal culture. If there is anything in which the Greek language stands pre-eminent it is in exactness of thought and perfect expression. The audience that would hiss an actor off the stage if a word was mispronounced ; the assembly so critical that their leading orator would take months in preparing his speech : these men would have nothing short of perfection. A language that has words to mark the inflection of the voice, to denote the curl of the scornful lip ; that has particles which open to the student's mind a new world of thought and meaning ; that has unmatched facility of combination and an infinite grace, must surely test the student to the utmost and lead him on in his efforts to master and translate it into his mother tongue. In this study the student's memory is strengthened, his English vocabulary enriched, his apprehension stimulated, his judgment ripened ; and, what is of so much importance to-day with so many undigested scraps of knowledge, he acquires the habit of close and diligent application. The fond parent of a classical student in the University of Nebraska told me last year that when his son studied his Greek lesson he locked himself in his room and gave strict orders not to be molested for two hours. That is as great a defence of Greek as I can make. Those two hours of close and intense application each day developed more brain and thinking power in that young man than three or four times as much time spent in reading as students so often do, when they combine a page of the author with the equivalent of several pages in irrelevant talk with a room-mate or friend.

It is not along the line of intellectual training or mental gymnastics that the opponents of Greek dare assail its battlements. They attack it on the so-called "useful" side. They say that the student can get "about" or "nearly" as good training in other lines besides securing a certain amount of "useful" knowledge which is not to be gained from the study of Greek. This latter point is sometimes granted them by certain individuals, but we do not propose to make any such cowardly surrender nor even run up the white flag of truce. We propose to meet them on the field of their own choice.

Greek claims a "useful" and very necessary place in any scheme of liberal education which considers the study of language, litera-

ture, and history of prime importance. It is in the study of Greek that we learn how men first began systematic thinking. In its literature we can see how all the forms of modern literatures were gradually unfolded from the embryo state of that of full maturity, from crude beginnings to polished perfection. In literature we have not become what we are through ourselves. We are the offspring of the Greeks. As Dr. Harris says, "We have borrowed their civilization and their literature." The Greek literature is the fountain head of epic, lyric, and dramatic poetry; it is the norm of prose writings, of history, oratory, philosophy. It is in the study of this language and literature that we can see how a people with no literature, no models, succeed in developing and bringing to a perfection that has never been surpassed, rarely if ever equalled, all the various branches of literature as we of to-day know them. It is this fact that secured for the Greek the position of teacher of Rome and schoolmaster of modern Europe. The nation of to-day that is acknowledged by all to be the *facile princeps* in higher university education is Germany. She has built her magnificent temple of learning upon Greek foundation. It is not strange that the language and literature of Greece should so early reach perfection and yield such rich results, for nature often brings forth her richest harvest from a virgin soil. The Greeks lived, most fortunately for them, in all the freshness of life's morning when the mists had risen and the sky was clear. Consequently we find in their writings a certain vividness, frankness, earnestness, not shared by other literatures, which appeals with special force to the young mind eager to enter upon its intellectual life. The Greek student finds the earliest literature possessing all the simplicity of that early age, the freshness of the childhood of the world. He finds that Homer is spontaneous, direct, noble, and yet plain withal; that he can put himself with equal ease in touch with every phase and changing mood of human life, and yet not lose a particle of that noble dignity which pervades the whole. But how is it with the Latin and English epics? Instead of being spontaneous, they are frequently learnedly allusive and almost one-half is lost if the reader has not a knowledge of the Homeric poems which both Vergil and Milton studied carefully. If nothing else would repay us for a careful and painstaking study of Greek surely one masterpiece of the Athenian dramatists contains sufficient reward. It has been well said that a student who has advanced far enough in his study of Greek—the sophomore year in the University of Nebraska—to read intelligently one

of the masterpieces of Aischylos or Sophokles has gained a clearer knowledge of the ancient world, has entered more fully into its spirit, can better understand the origin and development of the drama, than he could by reading a dozen volumes about the ancients. If a student is ever to get a clear, definite knowledge of literary forms and be able to make an intelligent study of English and modern literature from a scientific standpoint he must begin with Greek. Blot out all references to Greek originals and then try to solve the hopeless riddles of our literature. Scrupulously lay aside all the records of Greek antiquity and see how blurred and dull become the best pages of our poets. The very best contemporary English poetry is perfectly saturated with Greek. As Greek is of paramount importance in the study of English literature so it is equally important in the study of English as written and spoken. Professor Childs, formerly professor of English in Harvard, used to say: "If you want students to write good English, let them study Greek." Rufus Choate, the eminent lawyer and pleader, was accustomed to translate each day a passage of Greek into the best English he could command, that he might become a more thorough master of his native tongue, and gain a more accurate knowledge of those delicate turns and shades of expression on which in public speaking so much depends.

And what are we to say of the value of the Greek language in the study of Greek history when our best professors of history tell their students that they do not realize how much they lose if they do not utilize their opportunities and become able to handle the original text. The Persian war—a war that means more to us than all the wars of antiquity, for there is not a fibre of our western civilization that is not reddened by the blood that was shed at Marathon and Salamis—the Persian war must be studied not only in the easy and graceful Ionic of Herodotos but also in the massive Doric odes of Aischylos. He who would understand the Peloponnesian war and its far-reaching results must read the words not only of the terse, cool, calculating Thukydides and the cosmopolitan Xenophon, but he must also read him whom Browning calls "our Euripides the human", as well as turn the pages of the prince of all comedians—Aristophanes. Translations will not suffice for a critical and scientific study of history. Translations are always inadequate. History demands exactness, but translations are necessarily inexact and reflect to a greater or less extent the peculiar views of the translator. We maintain that one cannot get an adequate appreciation of that wonderful Greek world without a

knowledge of its language and literature ; and, furthermore, while one is broadening his mind and strengthening his intellectual powers by putting himself in sympathetic touch with his kinsmen across the ocean of centuries he is "laying in a stock of wise thought and observation" and undergoing a silent yet none the less potent influence of perfected and polished literary productions.

Why do our best scientists take a firm stand in defence of classical education ? Why do so many of them urge upon their students the necessity and the utility of the study of Greek ? Turn the pages of any text-book of Botany, Chemistry, Geology, or Zoölogy and even a hasty glance will give us an answer. It is because the study of Greek enables the student of science to grasp firmly the exact meaning of so many modern terms of science and art. The scientist cannot get along without Greek if he would not meet with difficulties at every turn in word-forms, word-compounds, old and new derivatives, scientific terminology in general. How many students, whose linguistic knowledge is limited to "moderns", know the exact meaning of even such common terms as telegraph, telephone, dynamo, or machine ? And when such students meet with terms like monochlamydeous, dicotyledon, or even our Nebraskan daimonelix, they stand aghast in utter bewilderment. The technical signification of such terms becomes clear to the student of Greek, for he grasps the meaning of their component parts. They convey to his mind a certain vividness of import which cannot be conveyed to the student who is ignorant of Greek. The classical student stands face to face with the original of these technical scientific terms, but his unfortunate companion who has no Greek must look at them through a colored or almost opaque medium. We cannot rid our language of these technical terms that are of Greek origin. There are thousands of them. They have come to stay. They are bringing hundreds of immigrants to our language-shores every year. By the very nature of the Greek language, its plastic character, its unmatched facility for making new compounds, it has become the greatest store-house from which we enrich our own language. If a student would know and understand what thinking people are talking about he must study the language from which these terms are derived. But there is also a wider field of utility as we pass from terms, from words, to subject matter. Buffon and Cuvier especially admired Aristotle's History of Animals, and the naturalist of the nineteenth century can still learn from him who is the "master of those who know". The physician too may still learn many valuable facts from him who first

said, "Life is short and art is long"—the physician of Kos, Hippocrates.

In this intensely critical age a microscopic examination is being made of almost every subject. We now pause and proceed slowly step by step with extreme caution over the course where our predecessors ran at full speed. Even our Christian religion does not escape this close criticism. Every word and phrase of original Scripture is placed under the most rigid examination. To the true scholar and earnest Christian a translation of the holy writings is no longer satisfactory. He wishes to be able to read the original and answer for himself questions that may arise as to the meaning of this or that particular word or sentence. No translation can convey the exact import and power of those important words of Christ and his apostles spoken and written in the Greek tongue. Many are the shades of thought and turns of expression that have eluded the translators. It is often truly said "Translations cannot be trusted." They blot out the author's characteristics. They may give the substance, but they lose the soul.

The greatest difficulty in our western schools and colleges is the lack of competent teachers of Greek. The subject itself cannot be condemned as impracticable or useless, since, as we know, it furnishes the best means of mental discipline and linguistic training, and is the basis of a scientific study of modern literature. Furthermore it enables the student of science to master technical and scientific terms. Let us meet the question squarely. We deprecate the subject when there is no ground for censure. The blame rests rather with ourselves. It is a case of "*Nos, nos consules desumus.*" We do not prepare ourselves sufficiently to teach the subject successfully. In some respects the greatest injury to sound education is caused at the present time by scrap-book knowledge, undigested bits of facts, which many persuade themselves constitute sound learning. A general perusal or skimming of many subjects is too often considered a college education. In the midst of so much hasty and often imperfect work there is one study which, less perhaps than any other, can be hastened or merely skimmed. The study of Greek requires and demands care and exactness on the part of both teacher and pupil. It calls a halt in this rapid march for general ideas and superficial knowledge and says "Be critical, be exact, in your thought and in your reasoning." There are some things in education that come only by a dead pull, and this is one of them. How many teachers are there in Nebraska who are prepared to teach Greek to their students as

a living language fairly instinct with human life, full of a vigorous vitality that can be imparted to the student, teeming with that deep inner life which every educated man should live? I fear that too many prepare their students in Greek for college as one was prepared, or rather unprepared, who told me a few weeks ago that before he came to the University of Nebraska he thought the study of Greek and Latin consisted in guessing at some kind of a translation by thumbing the dictionary and noticing what the words looked like. It was a boy with such a preparation who once translated the first line of the Aeneid, "There was a man who came from Troy with a dog in his arms." There is too much bad teaching of both Greek and Latin. No wonder the student cries out in rebellion against such treatment. Byron has immortalized such teaching in his lines—

Then farewell Horace ; whom I hated so,
Not for thy faults.

How often would the poor Greeks turn in their graves with a groan if they could hear some cold, soulless pedagogue trying to teach their literature in the dry grammatical grind,—the continual nibbling at the shell, but never giving the student a taste of the sweet kernel within. If the teacher does not know the kernel is there, if he cannot realize that Greek is a living literature, possessing a warm and responsive soul, then let him step down and out and pose no longer under an assumed name. If he cannot see, feel, and present to his pupils the beauty and charm of the Greek language, even during the first year that it is studied, then his teaching is a curse and he is committing a crime—an educational crime.

To remedy such defects in classical work, to preach the gospel of sound education, high ideals, purified taste, is manifestly the duty of the classical teachers in our colleges and universities. We trust some missionary work is being done here at the University of Nebraska to advance the good cause. Out of 175 students of Greek here this year we may rightfully expect a trained band of young men and young women who will return to their homes after graduation and will see to it that better methods and better results obtain in the future.

Meanwhile we have nothing to fear as to the final position of Greek in our schools, academies, colleges, and universities when our presidents, our professors, our educational leaders have their children and relatives take the classical course ; when many of our schools, whose principals and superintendents thought not long

ago they could not touch Greek for ten years, are now vying with each other as to which can secure the largest Greek classes and do the best work. When students are banding together and formally asking for instruction in Greek where formerly it was not given, one cannot doubt that the rising generation is determined to secure the benefits and wear the badge of a classical education. They are determined to have that genuine satisfaction which comes to every true student who feels that he has bridged the gulf of centuries and read intelligently some of those literary monuments of antiquity which the world has said shall never be consigned to oblivion.

We firmly believe the best minds will always follow the advice of Horace :

Vos exemplaria Graeca
Nocturna versate manu, versate diurna.

“Study Greek, study Greek.” We feel assured that Greek will still keep its place at the head of a liberal education course and will continue to bear the title of “facile princeps”. We know that all along the line there is a decided recoil from the intense materialism caused by too exclusive attention to nothing but science, and men are returning to character building, to mind culture, to the humanities.

The great mine of antiquity, of grand and ennobling ideals, is by no means exhausted. There we still find a rich store of experience ; there we shall continue to learn the lesson of life. As often as we choose to visit her shrine the oracle has a new lesson to teach us.

“For out of olde feldes, as men seith,
Cometh al this newe corn fro yere to yere;
And out of olde bokes, in good feith,
Cometh al this new science that men lere.”



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